

## DEE ANN TURNER Q & A

### **Q&A with Dee Ann Turner, author of IT'S MY PLEASURE: The Impact of Extraordinary Talent and a Compelling Culture**

***Q. IT'S MY PLEASURE takes readers into the heart of Chick-fil-A, offering unprecedented access. Why did you decide to share such valuable information?***

**A.** Our core values at Chick-fil-A are integrity, loyalty, generosity, and excellence. Founder Truett Cathy lived out these principles and expected the same from all of us.

For almost 30 years, I watched Truett. He recruited top-tier talent, and then showed those people how to embrace and nurture the culture he'd worked so hard to cultivate. He was so generous with his wisdom—he didn't hoard it. And he truly loved individuals and believed in their potential. He always said, "We are not in the chicken business. We are in the people business."

I've tried to follow in the footsteps of my predecessors. I love supporting people and helping them just blossom—it's my calling, to be a "facilitator of opportunity."

IT'S MY PLEASURE was born out of all of these things. We're cracking open our playbook because we constantly strive to be a business that's even more generous than we are successful. We share what we've learned because it strengthens both our industry and our business in general. Being generous also means we steward the talent and success we have achieved in order to help others do the same. At Chick-fil-A, our ultimate goal is to have a positive impact and influence on the lives of the people we encounter.

***Q. So much of IT'S MY PLEASURE is about defining and creating "compelling culture." Why is a company's culture so important?***

**A.** A company's culture is its soul. It will define the way employees interact with one another and guests and has the potential to reach far beyond offices and, in our case, restaurants, to touch and affect lives. A compelling culture will help a company fulfill its vision, while negative cultures are incredibly harmful and will ultimately limit the level of success an organization can achieve.

In IT'S MY PLEASURE, we look at culture under three different umbrellas: creating it, growing it, and then sharing it with outsiders—namely, guests.

Focusing on all three areas has been the key to Chick-fil-A's longevity and high performance.

***Q. How does Chick-fil-A measure success?***

**A.** Chick-fil-A has been blessed with tremendous success in business. We've achieved sales increases of more than 10% almost every year since opening in 1946. Our retention rate for our franchisees—we call them Operators—is also unusually high: 96% for almost 50 years. We have retained 95-97% of our corporate staff over the past 50 years as well. The company also became debt free in 2012. However, the real success is the growth of a culture that has nurtured and impacted so many people. We are able to positively impact people's lives when we share the success we have achieved, at Chick-fil-A we call it having an abundance mentality. Great leaders have an abundance mentality and they nurture it in their teams to strengthen the culture. They realize that success for others does not limit their own opportunity, but actually paves the way of success. Leaders and team members with abundance mentalities strengthen the culture and success of a team, and exponentially increase the likelihood of achieving team results.

But yes, we do use a different measuring stick. Even the most wildly successful companies in the world won't last forever. It's the lives changed and bettered forever by a company's culture that create the only legacy that truly matters.

***Q. You thoroughly explore culture and offer actual steps to creating and growing it. Let's start at the beginning: how do you create a compelling culture?***

**A.** It's always best to start at the beginning if you can. It's so much easier to create a compelling culture than to disrupt and rebuild a struggling one. I've had the honor and privilege of a great career by helping to grow this incredible Chick-fil-A culture. Compelling culture must start with a business's clear purpose for existing—that's step number one. You have to know why you're in business in the first place.

It's also crucial to invest on the front end by making a great selection in who joins your team. Effectively onboarding, training and developing employees is an investment to ensuring the kind of loyalty that increases retention in the long term.

The next step is to nail down a challenging mission. What are you actually going to do? This mission might change over time—it needs to be constantly evaluated.

The third step is to determine your core values. These are your anchors. Ask yourself: what do we believe in? Do we have experiences in our organization that will support these beliefs? How do we—and can we—express our beliefs?

Fourth, after you've established your purpose, mission, and values, pinpoint your guiding principles. Your principles will guide all aspects of what you do, why you do it, and how you go about it. For example, one of our guiding principles at Chick-fil-A is that everyone will be treated with honor, dignity, and respect. That guidepost leads to respecting one another's differences, which in turn leads to greater innovation and growth—progress and breakthroughs are spurred by differences.

***Q. You also really drill down into the nitty gritty, day-to-day operations of a business. For example: honesty and redirecting employees. Can you talk about this a bit?***

**A.** My mentor, Jimmy Collins, taught me “It is kindness to refuse immediately what you eventually intend to deny.” That thought has served me well in my career. Telling people “no” is often very difficult, but it is so important. If we want to cultivate a culture of loyalty, we have to be honest with one another. As supervisors, this means that if an employee asks for something and we are not going to be able to deliver it, we need to say no to begin with. If we hem and haw or give the impression that it's going to happen—when we know it isn't—integrity suffers and relationships are damaged.

An example of this happened not long ago. A staff member came into my office to receive coaching on a specific candidate situation. She really liked the candidate as a person, but she knew the role did not match the candidate's long-term goals. I asked the staff member, “Do you want to steal her career?” By placing the candidate in a role that was never going to allow her the opportunity she really wanted in her career, we would essentially be stealing her future opportunity. To hire her in our role, we would gain the benefits, but be a poor steward of her dreams.

Honesty also comes into play when we evaluate job performance. I write in the book that “nothing feels worse than constantly knowing you are not meeting someone's expectations.” If an employee isn't a good fit for the position he or she holds, I think there is a right way for it to be addressed—and it should be addressed! Some organizations just ignore the problem, which is even worse. So many leaders dread having to let someone go because they just don't want to hurt people, which is understandable. But when we aren't honest, don't communicate, and don't try to fix the problem, everyone suffers.

So here are some steps—some things to consider—if someone is struggling in a role: Are the expectations for this person clear? Is there another role in the company for which they might be a better fit? If you've both decided it's best to part ways, could you use an outplacement firm to help facilitate their transition to a new role with a new company?

Ultimately, every step is about communicating, and treating everyone with honor, dignity and respect.

***Q. These days, it's trendy to talk about how best to develop the next generation of talent. IT'S MY PLEASURE offers excellent advice on how to encourage and steward both new and seasoned talent.***

A. Organizations need to invest in new leadership and seasoned leadership. In the book, I discuss how to recruit the talent that will be the best fit for your organization, and then, how to support and maintain that talent.

A vital responsibility of any leader is to steward and nurture emerging talent. Emerging talent is looking for opportunities to add value and contribute immediately. Give them real responsibility and often because they want to contribute in a meaningful way. It is equally as important to allow emerging talent to fail without it being fatal. Success is a lousy teacher, so you have to let people make mistakes, learn and recover.

I also encourage companies to explore ways of utilizing the seasoned talent in their ranks. There are many ways to do this: ask veterans to mentor new leaders; frequently ask experienced leaders for their thoughts on broad issues currently facing the company; don't assume that seasoned leaders are not the ones with big new ideas; offer seasoned leaders opportunities for growth; and more. I like to say that young talent bring fresh perspective, while seasoned talent bring context to the equation. Together they make a winning combination.

***Q. While a lot of the book deals with managing people and driving culture, you also discuss discovering individual calling. Why is one's "calling" so important?***

A. A calling drives us. It makes us feel restless when we're not following it, and at peace when we're living it. A calling isn't a job. It's part of the very fabric of who you are.

Some time ago, I discovered that my calling is helping others discover theirs. In the book, I pose several questions and prompts designed to help readers

pinpoint their calling: What gets you up in the morning? What do others tell you that you do best? How can you use your energy to impact the world—or at least your corner of it?

***Q. You also discuss servant leadership. What is servant leadership, and why is it superior to other forms?***

**A.** Our servant leadership principles were formed in part by a senior executive who began his career as a teenager working in a Chick-fil-A restaurant. He happened to work for an exceptional Operator, who modeled servant leadership. Based on his approach, our leaders: 1) do not expect others to do what they are unwilling to do themselves; 2) acknowledge that every employee is important; 3) always make sure they're the last in line; 4) share opportunities and privileges with those who might never otherwise have them; and 5) are inclusive.

At Chick-fil-A, our form of servant leadership is pretty straightforward: practice service over privilege. Leaders give deference to others and do not expect, nor accept, privilege. We recognize the tremendous responsibility not only to lead, but also to *serve* those we lead. Individuals truly feel a part of the mission of the organization and feel treated with honor, dignity and respect. This type of inclusivity strengthens the culture at all levels of the organization.

A company's culture is transformed when leaders adhere to principles like these. It creates incredible camaraderie, loyalty, and above-and-beyond work ethic.

***Q. You also delve deeply into creating memorable, unique experiences for guests. Why?***

**A.** Creating unique experiences for your guests is one of the most effective ways to take your company's culture into the world. It is also how you build loyalty. Chick-fil-A creates remarkable experiences through specialty events like Daddy/Daughter Date Nights, The First 100, and Backstage Tours of new restaurants.

And while the marquee events we present are important, so many Chick-fil-A Operators create memorable experiences for our guests every single day by going above and beyond—delivering what we call “Second-Mile Service” and always responding to requests and even expressions of gratitude with a sincere, “It’s my pleasure!”

I love the story of one Chick-fil-A team member meeting a mom who was a regular at her car with an umbrella in the rain. The team member walked the mom and her little ones inside, where their usual order was ready by the time

they all sat down.

That's just one example of the kind of treatment that happens every day at our restaurants. We're known for treating our guests like friends and family—our goal is for Second-Mile Service to become second nature, and for the gratitude we feel for being able to serve our guests to come across genuinely.

When all is said and done, that's what truly matters: the enduring power of a culture that has developed, nurtured, and impacted so many people. That's more valuable than any sales record or growing profits.

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### **About Dee Ann Turner**

Dee Ann Turner is VP, Sustainability for Chick-fil-A, where she began her career more than 30 years ago. She has previously served as the VP, Enterprise Social Responsibility; VP, Corporate Talent; VP, Talent and VP, Human Resources. Her first book, *It's My Pleasure: The Impact of Extraordinary Talent and a Compelling Culture*, reveals the secret sauce behind building and growing Chick-fil-A's revolutionary business model. Turner believes talent offers competitive advantage in any organization, and companies that recognize the value of individuals can succeed not just ethically, but financially as well. She currently serves on the board of advisors for First Care Clinics and on the board of advisors for the business school at Lubbock Christian University. The married mother of three is also active with a variety of family-focused missions that support women and children.